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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, July 4, 1940.

Subject: "FOOD QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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It's the Fourth of July and Uncle Sam's postmen are on holiday, but nevertheless our mailbag contains its usual quota of questions--food questions, today.

New food products on the market usually suggest many nutrition questions to homemakers who want to vary or improve the family diet. Here are several from a New Jersey woman who is interested in papaya juice:

"Do you have any information on the vitamins in papaya juice? Is it rich in vitamin C? What about the other vitamins,--A, B₁, and G, in particular? And is papaya juice important for its minerals?"

One of the nutrition experts in the Bureau of Home Economics replies:

"Papaya juice has not been studied as extensively as the fruit itself. Papayas are considered a rich source of vitamin A, a good to rich source of vitamin C or ascorbic acid, and a fair source of vitamin G or riboflavin. They also contain some thiamin or vitamin B₁. If the ripe fruit is juiced, a considerable amount of these vitamin values would no doubt be found in the juice. The vitamin C content of the juice itself has been studied, so we know that the juice of ripe papayas is a good source of vitamin C.

"As to mineral content, the papaya contains only small amounts of calcium, phosphorus, and iron, and rates as a poor source of these minerals."

The next letter starts out:

"What's all this controversy about spinach? Are we to drop spinach from the family menu after all these years of emphasizing its importance?"

No indeed. There's no good reason for dropping spinach from the bill-of-fare. Nutritionists still consider spinach a rich source of some of the important vitamins,--notably A and C,-- and it also provides some iron, as well as bulk or roughage. And it is one of our inexpensive leafy vegetables.

It is true that studies have shown that the calcium in spinach is in a form not well used in the body. Also, statements have appeared, asserting that very little of the iron of spinach is available to the human system. Scientific opinion differs on the last point. Some reports say that 68 percent of the iron of spinach is used by the body.

Answering the calcium story first: very few persons would look to spinach to get their calcium. They drink milk and eat cheese, if they know their food values. And for iron, they would be likely to eat egg yolk, lean meat, and many leafy vegetables, including spinach, to get enough iron. Whether a person decides to eat spinach or not, it is only fair to remember that these green leaves are rich in vitamins A and C. So they do contain important food values.

Visions of pancakes and sirup are conjured up by the next questions, from a woman who lives in Minnesota.

"How does buckwheat flour compare with plain wheat flour in its starch content? And what are the vitamins of each?"

If this lady is hoping to cut down calories by using buckwheat flour, we must tell her that the total carbohydrate content of buckwheat flour,-- and that means the starch,-- compares very closely with that of plain wheat flour. That is, each contains between 70 and 80 percent carbohydrate.

Now as to the vitamins in the two flours: Except for some thiamin or vitamin B₁, refined wheat flour is not a source of any vitamins. Entire grain products are a better source of vitamins, and like the seeds of other plants, buckwheat grain is a good source of vitamin G or riboflavin, as well as thiamin. When you make buckwheat grain into flour you no doubt lose some of the vitamin values. It all depends

on how the grain was milled. There is probably more of the germ of the grain and therefore more of the original vitamin content in the dark, than in the light-colored buckwheat flour.

However, it is more important to think of food selection in terms of the diet as a whole, than to give too much attention to the nutritive value of single foods such as wheat or buckwheat flour.

In planning a low-cost diet, when the greatest possible food value must be obtained for every penny spent, whole grain cereals are especially important, because they help reinforce the diet in some of the vitamins and minerals, particularly vitamin B₁ and iron.

The last question for today brings up the old controversy about the color of eggshells. "I understand there is no difference in food value of white eggs and brown eggs," writes this correspondent, "but I have heard claims that a brown egg has more flavor in its taste."

Scientists of the the Bureau of Home Economics dismiss this notion with the other idea about egg colors. They do not believe there is any relationship between the color of the egg shell and either the nutritive value or the flavor of the egg's contents. The color of the shell depends on the breed of the hen. The quality and flavor of any strictly fresh egg depend on the hen's food, as well as on her breed.

And that finishes up the questions for today. Next week we'll have some more for you.

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